MANCHESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Study of Religion, Theology and Philosophy. What is its worth?

VISITOR'S ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. CHAS. HARGROVE, M.A.

JUNE 22nd, 1899.

"The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines."

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ADDRESS.

THIS College "exists for the purpose of promoting the Study of Religion, Theology and Philosophy."* It was "to establish a plan affording a full and systematic course of education for Divines" that it was founded. "Piety alone," said its first Principal, in the discourse delivered at its opening, "however sincere, however fervent, will not insure to a Minister of Religion respectability or success. It must be regulated and assisted by Knowledge." "The acquisition of theological knowledge, the exercise of theological thought, the attainment of theological truth," said his revered successor, who to-day maintains the honour of the College in this ancient University, "these are the objects which we are to pursue."† It is for Study this place has been built; it is for the acquisition and transmission of knowledge that it is supported; its teaching staff are all Students, and its Students all purpose to be Teachers. Divinity, the knowledge of God and of man in his relation to God,—this is the object for which it exists, and (as was said at its commencement) "nothing which can illustrate either the perfection of the one or the nature, capacities and history of the other, can be alien to it or entirely unimportant."

But why go about to prove that which you all know, or anticipate objections which Dr. Barnes contemptuously dismissed as unworthy of polite treatment more than a hundred years ago? "With those who deny human learning," he said, "we decline all controversy. Their reason is obvious. Illiterate themselves, why should we wonder if, like the Vandals of old, they endeavour to destroy all the monuments and honors of literature in others?"

* Prospectus printed at end of Annual Report.
† Address delivered at the Opening of the College at Oxford.

One might indeed reply that the race of Vandals is never extinct, and that there are perhaps more to be found to-day, who depreciate learning to exalt piety than there were in the times when our College had its seat at Manchester. We hear even among ourselves curious remarks about the importance of "the heart being in the right place," with allusion to "the head" as a member of comparatively insignificant importance. But the contrast is as ridiculous literally as it is figuratively; and those who would support their delusion by analogy of soul and body, argue to their own confusion. A heart without a head were a pump and not a man; a head without a heart were an empty vessel: so zeal without knowledge is headlong and full of danger to zealot and to his victims; knowledge without zeal is inoperative. But I cannot hope that any arguments of mine will reach those who forestall argument by disparaging reason, and set at naught the science on which reasoning is grounded. And I am bound to assume that among the supporters of this College there are none to be found who do not set highest value upon all sound and accurate learning for the pursuit of which the College exists.

But there are two objections of another kind and proceeding from quite other than Vandal sources, which are more operative in our day than they were perhaps ever before,—objections which we must all have felt occasionally, which if admitted would prove our College to be even worse than useless, for learning which is not sound and profitable is mischievous and misleading to those who come under its influence.

The first is that there does not as a fact exist any Science of Theology such as we devote ourselves to the maintenance of. You might, indeed, induce some generous and credulous people to found a school for the study of Astrology, and an immense amount of industry and learning and research might be spent on the development and propagation of this pseudo-science; but the

sincerity and the talents of those devoted to the teaching and learning of it would not avail to lift it out of the category of delusions. There is a history of Astrology and a literature, and there are astrological methods and traditions to the study of which a life may be devoted, but there is no basis of solid fact on which the whole rests. And such they tell us is our Theology. Of God we know nothing and can know nothing; our highest studies attain not to heaven but merely to what other men have thought and written and fancied before us; anything we can add is only contribution of fancies and thoughts, vain all of them as vapours heaped upon vapours when the clouds change form and colour in the setting sun—such is their too confident assertion.

I shall content myself to reply, that Religion is as real a fact as any other which engages the attention of students, and of immensely greater importance to humanity than are many sciences which Agnostics themselves deem full worthy of a life-long devotion. To give all our attention to the physical forces of which our planet is the result and neglect those moral forces whose outcome is civilised man, is to prefer the lower before the higher, to value the dwelling-place above the dweller in it. If it be true, as Pope wrote at first, that

"The only science of mankind is man,"

and that we see all things under the colour of human nature, then is the science of man's relation to the Infinite one of the noblest as well as the most real of sciences; and we may boldly make for Theology the claim it has set up of old to be the Queen under whose rule other sciences find their place and due relation.

It is the other and stronger objection, very old indeed, yet born anew of the weariness and doubt and disappointment of our age, which I desire to face honestly for a brief while this afternoon. *What profit is there in this or any study which is not concerned with the things of our daily life?* The arts and sciences, we understand

of what use they are, and so we give cheerfully of public money for schools of design, and colleges of science, and laboratories, and fine art galleries, and the teaching of modern languages, and all the like; their common object to make life more comfortable and more refined. But philosophy, theology, aye and many would add history, archæology, literature, poetry, what can they do for us in this life or the other?

There is a story told of St. Philip Neri,—a Saint who has an especial interest for Oxford and for England, because to him it was as founder of the Oratorians, that some of the most distinguished members of this University transferred their allegiance a generation ago, and by so doing naturalised the Oratory in this country,—that once there came to him a certain young man, Francisco Zazzara, who was a student of law, diligent and ambitious, looking forward to winning some day distinction and high office at the Papal Court. And the Saint received him with all kindness, and began to congratulate him on his prospects. "Happy man that you are! now you are a student, soon you will be a Doctor of Laws and begin to make money; you will be the means of advancing your family in the world, and likely enough some day you will become a distinguished Prelate!" And so he went on talking of all the great things he might accomplish, and become this and that just as the youth himself had often imagined in his day dreams. "Happy fellow that you are," concluded Philip, "you will have everything you could wish for!" Francis listened well pleased to this high oracle which so authorised all his fondest hopes; but presently Philip put his arm round his neck and drawing his head towards him said in his ear, "E poi?" "and then?" And the words sank into the heart of the hearer, and he turned back home; but his studies failed to engage him as before because of that importunate "E poi?" and he let all go, the study of law, and the dignities and riches he hoped to gain by it, and gave himself to God.

So runs the story of that Roman youth, dead and buried these three hundred years and more. But the applications of it are more than the Saint would have sanctioned. It is not of wealth and honours and power only we may ask "And then?" The same mournful refrain obtrudes upon all our pursuits. What comes of them at last? "As it happeneth to the fool so will it happen even to me" said of old he who had "applied his heart to know wisdom", for he found this too like all else to be "vanity and a striving after wind." For is it not true of the learned even as of the rich, "When he dieth he shall carry nothing away; and his renown" if indeed he have won it "shall not descend after him"? Of what good in the next life to have "scorned delights and lived laborious days" in order to accumulate knowledge? Shall I beyond the grave find a use for Greek and Latin, French and German, for Ancient and Modern History, for imperfect acquaintance with Art and Nature, for skill painfully acquired in controversies of our twilight? What *then?*

John Stuart Mill has told the world of the desolation of soul which came upon him in the full midst of ardent studies begun as a mere infant and carried on despite all the temptations of youth. "Suppose" he asked himself "that all your objects in life were realised; that all the changes to which you are looking forward, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?" It was a nobler ambition by far his than was that of St. Philip's young friend, but it was as hopelessly ineffective. "An irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' And at this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for."*

"Autobiography," ch. v.

Such experiences are not peculiar to men of distinction. I remember how the like happened to myself when the greed of knowledge first took possession of me and life seemed worth having just for the sake of learning. It was in the University Library at Cambridge; I was planning such a course of reading as is possible only to the dreams of youth; of nothing worth knowing would I be ignorant, science and art and history and literature and philosophy and theology should reveal to me all they had most precious; I rejoiced in the immense treasures open to me, as it seemed, to appropriate of them whatever I desired to make my own; when suddenly there came to me as a voice of the wind, blowing I knew not whence, the thought—and suppose I had all knowledge, suppose I was intimate with all of best and noblest and most interesting which this vast Library contains, *what then?* I should know so much, should I be so happy? should I be as happy then as I am now in my ignorance, with all the unknown yet to find out? If to learn be the student's true happiness, and to know bring with it little of satisfaction; if the delight be all of discovery, and possession have no charm; then is not knowledge vanity? and study waste of time better given to winning heaven, or certainly to enjoying earth? I have never got quite rid of the impression of that hour, and often has the remembrance of it risen up to check a too eager ambition to learn, or console me that my lot in life has not been cast in some ancient seat of learning.

For assuredly knowledge is not an end in itself to which human aspirations may tend and find in its attainment their rest. Even if there be a knowledge of God, a true science of theology, yet "it shall vanish away." Our highest gain here is but as an illumination of candles which make a little circle of uncertain light amid surrounding darkness, and in the rising of the sun are lost to sight.

St. Thomas Aquinas the great theologian of the Middle

Ages, had mastered all that men of his time knew, and what was far more had brought together all results of human learning in one great Summa, or Whole of Theology. He began with God as mortal vision could discern him, dealt with the work of creation, and the nature of angels and of men, and traced the long path by which sinful man may by his own acts and the virtue of sacraments and the Grace of Christ, return to Him from whom he came; and then the grand interlude of time should be ended at the Final Judgment, and Hell and Heaven alike be subject to Eternity, whose bliss and whose woe are without duration and therefore without end. Such was the magnificent plan he set before himself, and in such way did he accomplish it that now, after six hundred years of intellectual growth, men are still studying by his light, and even those who do not share his faith find what to admire and to profit of in his work.

But the great work which was to crown his life with lasting fame and earn for him the not empty title of Doctor Angelicus, was left by him incomplete; for it is told of him that when the end was close at hand, (it remained only to treat of the lesser sacraments and of Resurrection and of Judgment), as he knelt in prayer one morning there came over him a wonderful change, and thenceforth he would neither write nor dictate any more, but put away all writing materials from him. And his faithful disciple and scribe, Friar Raynald, was distressed that his master had ceased from the work in which he had been hitherto so interested, and he ventured at last to remonstrate. "Father, how is it that thou hast left off so great a work, which thou didst begin for God's glory and the illumination of the world?" Then answered Friar Thomas, "I can do no more."

And Friar Raynald was afraid lest it might be that excessive study had enfeebled his brain, so he kept on urging that he would try to go on writing; I suppose divided between hope and

fear of what might come of such an attempt, for his master seemed lost to the world and to all that went on around him, and seemed wholly intent upon things of which he spoke not, and which none of those by him could see. So the brother kept on urging him, and tried hard to recall him from the clouds to this urgent business, which might shortly be completed, an everlasting monument to the honour of the writer and of the Order to which he belonged. But Thomas answered ever, "I cannot." Then at last yielding to his disciple's insistance for a reason, "Raynald, I cannot, for all the things which I have written seem to me now as mere chaff, compared to that which I have seen and which God hath made known to me."

He was scarcely 48 years old at the time, but the end of his life's work was at hand, and the unfinished Summa stands through the ages as a lesson of the futility of man's highest efforts to find out God and explain his ways. Theologians, Councils, Pontiffs have "extolled the work with loudest praise and borne amplest testimony to its unrivalled merits," while, as the present Pope goes on to say, "it has extorted from the very adversaries of the Catholic name homage, praise and admiration." "After the Summa" it has been said "there remains nothing for man to learn of God till he reach heaven," and it is the comment of Cardinal Manning, "The saying is not an academical exaggeration but a very truth." It would take long to repeat a fair selection of the encomiums lavished on a work which has been regarded by Catholics as next to Holy Scripture and the standard of orthodox faith; yet the judgment of its author remains on record, "*Omnia quæ scripsi videntur mihi paleæ,*" worthless as chaff my profoundest thoughts compared to the truth of God. "Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded" said the King, when he had spent all that earth's wealth and art could afford to build a temple worthy of his God. So too St.

Thomas; when he had summed up the labour of a life time in one great full treatise, comprehending all that might be known of God, lo! before yet it was finished he found it unworthy, for he saw God, so infinitely beyond all that might be known or told of Him by man. "*Chaff*," our weightiest reasons, our deepest conclusions; when the wind blows, and the clouds disperse, and God's Glory is revealed, they are blown away and forgotten. What can an ant know of the sun, or a man of God?

So we ask ourselves, Protestants and Free Thinkers though we be, Is not the Author of the Imitation right after all, "What availeth a man to reason deep of the mysteries of God? For high and curious reasons make not a man holy nor rightwise, but a good life maketh him beloved of God. If thou knewest all the Bible and the sayings of all philosophers what should it profit thee without grace and charity?" If I had full knowledge of all the subjects taught at this College, and united in my single self all the learning which is divided among the learned members of our teaching staff, I should indeed be famous among theologians, and win perhaps the coveted title "a scholar of European reputation," but what should it profit me beyond men's praise, the trumpet blast which so soon dies upon the wind?

And if I do not seek praise or value fame, but desire only the good of my fellow men, then shall I not be reproved when I remember that the great Apostles, whose preaching was effective to win a world for a crucified master, are described by persons who knew them as "unlearned and ignorant men"?

All this seems to me unanswerable, if the statement put in the forefront of the Roman and Presbyterian Catechisms, and generally accepted by the older churches, be allowed to be a full and complete account of the meaning of human life and the destiny of man.

"What is the chief end of man?" asks the Shorter Catechism. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever."

"Why did God make you ?" is the corresponding question in the Roman Catholic Catechism, and the answer is like, "To know him, love him and serve him in this life and to be happy with him for ever in the next."

It is common to them both, as to Christian teaching in general, that the individual is treated as if he stood alone, his life business is with God, his end is gained when he has reached his own felicity. To me it seems that in such a scheme of life there is little room left for study, and small use of knowledge on whose acquirement precious time must be spent. "To be happy for ever,"—if that is what I am made for, if it be that which as a reasonable being I should devote my whole self to the winning of, then does it seem to matter little the more or less of knowledge I may acquire here, before I reach the vision of Him of whom St. Gregory the Great writes: "Quid ibi nescient ubi scientem omnia sciunt—What there shall they not know, when they shall know Him who knows all things ?"

But if it be more true the view of human life which was taught of old and is slowly gaining ground among us—that we are none of us individuals, divided from and independent of others; that we are not figuratively but literally part of a great whole; that none can reach his perfection alone, and that the end for which we are made is Humanity and not self—if this be so then all learning assumes another aspect and science reasserts its supreme value. For we labour and learn not for ourselves but for the race; the torch we have carried through the darkness falls from our palsied hands but it is not extinguished. A younger follower kindles his fresh light at our expiring embers, and passes on; a little while he bears it aloft till yet another take hold; and after our lips have long been dumb, and our rudimentary theories have been superseded, and our confident judgments been confuted, the light we have cherished will still shine on. Nor only so, but it will grow brighter and brighter

to the final confusion of controversy and the salvation of mankind.

For indeed in that olden Torch Race they did but hand on the light one to another as they swiftly passed, this the skill of each competitor—not to let the light die out. So did the men of old think of knowledge as of some island possession once acquired and by the very circumstances of its position not to be extended; and so did the Churches think of Revelation as given once for all and to be taught faithfully as it has been received, neither adding to nor taking away from its Divine perfection.

But on our day has dawned another vision and a nobler hope has inspired us. For we have seen the realm of knowledge extending far and wide its bounds, and we have believed that Revelation was not sealed when a favoured age had closed, but is ever open to man, and depends in its depth and extent only on our own ability to receive it, on our having ears to hear God's voice and eyes to discern the open vision of His glory.

I stood a few days ago within the shadows of York Minster; far above me rose the ancient towers and dwarfed to insignificance the tiny dwellings men had erected to serve for birth and life and death. In the still sunlight of that summer's day they seemed to belong more to heaven than to earth, yet stood, not more serene against the blue sky than mid the storms of the six hundred winters through which they had passed, steady if not unscathed. How small and frail and short-lived seemed I, who lifted up eyes to wonder from so far beneath! before my distant ancestors were born they stood where now they stand, and when my children's children have long been forgotten they will still be there! And yet, I thought, it was even men such as myself who reared this solemn pile; a multitude of men, great and small, forgotten all of them together but surviving in their glorious work. One indeed conceived the thought of it in his mind and drew it on paper, but in vain had been the conception had not very many combined to

carry it into effect. There were some to dig the foundation, and some to quarry stone, and there were cartmen and labourers and stone masons and builders as well as sculptors and architects and designers. And of each one the part was essential, no single stone but some brother's hands had hewn it out of the rock, and fashioned it, and fitted it to its place; and none so humble but that his work was essential to the whole.

And then I bethought me of that invisible Temple which the Divine Architect with infinite patience is long a-building by labour of man—the temple whose foundations we have not yet dug out, for it shall stretch far and wide when once completed, and rise high to the heavens. It is the temple of Science, with upsoaring towers, and long drawn aisles, and chapels of secret awe, and shrines of awful Presence of God made known to men. Temple, within and around whose unfinished walls we wander to-day, filled with joy and wonder though at present we can only guess at the plan, and though so much be yet scarce imagined. Temple, in which men of the future shall walk in sweet communion, and pity our ignorance, and marvel at our follies, and experience that true knowledge and worship are all as one.

And to the building of this temple we are all called to help. Some few to great tasks, to set up a tower or to mark out some lines of new foundation, but all to labour according to their ability. For it were impossible to maintain intact that which is already known of men unless there were many to whom the treasure was committed. We advance as a mighty army, a very few go before scouts and pioneers, but all follow. It is the great body which must take possession of what the few discover—knowledge is given to individuals only for the benefit of the race. And none of us learn solely to our own advantage.

Therefore my brethren, you who labour here in the holy cause of learning and you who have a share of those labours by the support you give for their maintenance, be not discouraged at the

apparently small result of great toil, nor be disappointed that the world does not appreciate the worth of even your best work. It is not for yourselves nor for this generation that you are engaged, it is for Humanity, for a better future. And no true work is lost, the stone stands square and firm to-day where hands turned to dust laid it long centuries ago. The result of a life time may be only to "settle *Hoti's* business, properly base *Oun*, give us the doctrine of the enclitic *De;*" nay, may be no more than just to have preserved such facts to acquire which others had given their lives; but so is the Temple upreared, spade and trowel and hod must be used and there must be abundance of common workmen, as needful those as they who use the chisel and the compass and supervise what others do.

Let us work on then, not less diligently than they who toil for gold or for fame. Their's a fading crown, if indeed they win one at all, for they work for themselves and they needs must die. Ours the reward to leave behind us what we have done and learnt, that men may be the richer and nearer God and truth for our labours.

To all whose noble and happy vocation is learning I would commend the rule of the ancient Constitutions of the Order which gave Aquinas to the world, where speaking of the duties of students it concludes, "Ipsi vero in studio taliter sint intenti, ut de die, de nocte, in Domo, in itinere legant aliquid vel meditentur; and quidquid poterunt retinere cordetenus nitantur.—Let them so earnestly apply themselves to study, that by day and by night, at home and on the road, they read something or think it over; and as far as they can let them try to commit to memory what they find of worth." Or, if it be too far to send you for counsel to Rules drawn up by that "Athlete of the faith," to whose praise Dante reckons it that he was, "ai nemici crudo," stern to such foes as we—if you would have example nearer home, take for your own the words of our dear English

saint, never canonized of Rome, the Venerable Bede; he who in quiet life-long study won for himself an immortal name, and for his country the praise to have owned the greatest scholar of the age he lived in. Obscure and uneventful his life, by this only relieved from useless monotony and made abundant of fruit and delight, that, as he tells us, "semper aut discere, aut docere, aut scribere dulce habui." Be it ours of this College ever to find it sweet to learn, to teach, to write; and may we leave to our successors store of learning, larger and better ordered than we have received. So shall we be faithful to the trust received from the past; and generations yet unborn shall be wiser and happier for our labour and patience, and shall bless the far off ancestors, whose names they may have forgotten but whose work shall abide the indispensable foundation of all that the future is to achieve.